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The Cultural Dynamics of Identity Formation: managing commercial-professional discourses in a Dutch newspaper and a British television station.

by

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ABSTRACT
This study examines how members of media organisations deal with their increasingly commercialised working environments. We explore the experiences of members of two media organisations, an established Dutch newspaper and a new British television station, and trace how journalists, editors and others involved in producing and managing news and features construct their organisational realities. Our research methods are qualitative and we take a cultural approach to analysis.

We find that media organisations are characterised by conflicting ideologies which are exposed in the tension between commercial values concerning profits, and professional values concerning quality. We suggest that cultural values, ideologies and discourses are used situationally and strategically depending on individual and collective interests, emotions and identifications. In conceptualising the processes through which individuals and organisations interact to continually negotiate their contexts and identities, we note that change and continuity, harmony and conflict exist simultaneously; consequently, culture is best viewed as an ensemble of disparate meanings that mutually implicate, contradict or even confuse each other. This approach acknowledges the often paradoxical nature of cultural reality and highlights the interrelationship between conflict and order. The study serves as an 'extreme case' of the cultural politics that take place in all organisations which are concerned with both profits and quality.

INTRODUCTION

Recent research on media institutions indicates considerable transformation has taken place within the European media arena over the last decade. Economic, political and social pressures, together with the arrival of new technology, have contributed to new forms of media regulation, a proliferation of distribution platforms, new structures and patterns of ownership, new working practices and increasing competition for revenues and audiences or readers (McQuail and Siune 1998; Robbins 1995; Siune and Truetzschler 1991)[1]. Much of the research undertaken during the 1990s either implies or directly contends that on the whole a shift has occurred in the strategic focus of media organisations (McQuail 1998; de Bens and Ostbye 1998) with economic imperatives now more overtly pursued than in the past.

Previously, notions of public service together with professional norms concerning creativity and quality were key drivers of corporate strategies but, arguably, these are jeopardised when commercial values are prioritised. Once traditional values lose their stable and self-evident character, the social validation of non-commercial standards becomes increasingly problematic. In a more commercialised working environment, a sense of public responsibility, and aesthetic or journalistic aspirations may be

[1]A number of studies have traced the changing scene at different levels and in different countries, for example, Ferrell Lowe and Alm (1997) in Finland, Davis et al (1998) in Russia, and Saundry and Nolan in the UK.

considered out of date or irrelevant. Indeed, there a risk that these values may be co-opted for the purposes of management and marketing.

The idea that cultural products can become corrupted and exploited to achieve capitalist ends was first muted by Adorno and Horkheimer who, writing in the 1940s, argued that: "Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth is that they are just business made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce" (1986,121). Their stance, which continues to be influential today, posits that the products of 'culture industries' (which include newspapers and television) are manufactured and manipulated according to rationalised organisational procedures with the sole aim of making profits. The impact of strategies such as these on organisation members has been noted, for instance, in some of the North American literature where the production and manufacture of American television has long been rooted in business interests. Cantor, for instance, writes that this has resulted in "content [which is] produced by people who are either willing to suppress deep-seated dissident values (should they have such values) or by people who are fundamentally in agreement with the system" (1980, 83).

We do not intend to demonise commercial values anew. However, these ideas do provide a useful starting point for our unravelling of the workings of contemporary processes of commercialisation. This is an area of research which has been neglected in the last decade or so, with perhaps the exception of the work of Negus who offers a critique of Adorno and Horkheimer's theorising (1996, 1998). On the whole, studies of media organisations have tended to concentrate on external forces for change, on new organisational structures, or on the transformation of working practices. Little attention has been paid to the impact of new commercial practices and profit-related strategies on the working lives of organisation members or on the role that individuals play in shaping their working contexts. Although early British and American media studies did acknowledge a tension between commercial and professional values (such as those held by managers on the one hand, and journalists or creative workers on the other), the empirical work which led to these ideas was conducted in the more stable, less competitive 1970s and early 1980s (eg. Burns 1977; Cantor 1980; Elliott 1977; Gallagher 1982; Weaver and Wilhoit 1986). None of the literature of this period, then, was able to investigate media organisations, and in particular the views of media professionals, operating in dynamic, competitive environments. Therefore, the research question that we address is "how do members of media organisations deal with commercial and professional discourses in everyday organisational life, and how are tensions between commercial and professional values managed over time?"

We investigate the experiences of journalists, editors and other media professionals involved in producing and managing news and features in two media organisations operating in different sectors and contexts: a Dutch daily newspaper and a British television station. The newspaper is an established and well-respected national title with a stable readership. It is published by a parent company that also publishes books, journals and a variety of regional and national newspapers. The television station is a new, regional company, tracked over the first three years of its genesis in the early part of the 1990s. Its structure and methods of operating were designed from the outset to be competitive and thus to break the mould of traditional broadcasting practices. The two cases are part of a wide spectrum of media organisations that are currently confronting competitive and commercial pressures. Although there are

distinct differences between the two cases (nation, sector, age, image), we attempt to highlight some of the similarities in order to draw attention to the commercial-professional dilemma which we identify as a core cultural issue in media organisations.

The contribution of this work in a wider sense is that it serves to illustrate the tensions that exist in all organisations. In contemporary society, many organisations are involved in privatising and commercialising processes, just as many also confront external and internal demands for public service and accountability. The competing imperatives of commercial gain and public service are often reflected within organisations in two discourses: one that nurtures the value of quality, creativity or professionalism, and another in which managerial values are central, such as cost-consciousness, financial health, market position and further growth of the company. Tensions between the two are particularly salient in culture industries, especially media organisations where this tension is at the heart of decision making. Therefore, the study of television and newspaper organisations serves as an 'extreme case' of the cultural politics of the profits versus quality debate within all organisations.

In our analysis of the two focal organisations, we apply a cultural approach and endeavour to develop a framework for conceptualising the processes through which individuals and organisations interact to construct their contexts and identities. We argue that the choice of a cultural approach is appropriate for the study of media organisations for a number of reasons. First, media organisations recognise themselves as 'cultural' in a way that most other organisations do not. They see themselves as communication channels which, by conveying cultural content, serve both to shape and to reflect societal culture (McQuail 1987). Second, the complex nature of television and newspapers - with their integral linkages between producers, product and audience or readers - calls for the pursuit of a holistic approach to their study. A cultural approach is able to achieve this because of its capacity to identify the relationship between beliefs, values, and their manifestations such as language, behaviours, symbols and physical artifacts (Hatch 1993), and also because of its ability to reveal processes of change and continuity (for example, Knights and Willmott 1995).

Third, a cultural approach is concerned with meaning, interpretation and with how and why people construct the worlds in which they live and work. Drawing on Marcus and Fischer (1986), we see that "not only is the cultural construction of meaning and symbols inherently a matter of political and economic interests, but the reverse also holds - the concerns of political economy are inherently about conflicts over meanings and symbols" (p.85, as cited in Negus 1998, 360). A cultural approach, therefore, provides us with a tool for discerning how members of our focal organisations deal with the commercial-professional issue.

We contend that members of media organisations deal with the issue of competing imperatives in media organisations by instrumentally utilising both commercial and professional discourses situationally and strategically in order to shape their cultural identities. Although a commercial discourse is managerially-driven, compromising traditional notions of professionalism and undermining professional identities, nevertheless, journalists and others in professional roles use it at their own discretion alongside traditional professional principles in order to continually negotiate their contexts. We note that individuals act autonomously and opportunistically in this

process. We go on to discuss the nature of culture, and the relationship between conflict and order in the process of identity formation. First, however, our account presents an outline of the British television and Dutch newspaper sectors in order to situate our case studies.

THE MEDIA: ORGANISATIONS AND SECTORS

In the public broadcasting sector, such as the BBC in the UK, the most common form of revenue generation is from licence fees. In privately owned broadcasting and newspaper companies, revenues are derived from multiple sources, the primary source in television being advertising, while in the case of newspapers, it is both readers and advertisers[2]. To a greater or lesser extent media organisations depend for their revenues on their prominence and popularity among the public, with various types of market research providing information to advertisers and editors about circulations and ratings, readership preferences and audience lifestyles. However, the success of media organisations as commercial enterprises is only partly a matter of economic calculation. As culture organisations, there is more to them than just profitability. Because they play a central role in contemporary society, they are charged with public accountability and therefore their output is evaluated according to public standards. Furthermore, there is an intrinsic value to mass media products that is determined by the aesthetic, creative, entertaining, informing or interpretive properties of programmes and newspapers. For those working in the mass media, therefore, their success is evaluated not only in economic terms, but also according to intrinsic professional standards. The dilemma for managers of commercial media organisations is to weigh quality demands against costs and benefits, thereby attempting to reconcile professional and public interest motives with the drive for profits. Equally, journalists and those involved in creative work have traditionally sought to resist commercial pressures in their determination to achieve 'professionally' defined quality. Although professional and commercial discourses have historically characterised media organisations, arguably this tension is more pronounced in today's competitive climate.

The British television sector: the case of CTV

In contrast with the newspaper business, the television sector has relied on public funding for a long time. Before the 1990s, Europe's national broadcasting systems were deliberately designed to serve public rather than private interests, that is, they were mostly non-commercial organisations. Much national broadcasting was in the hands of public sector monopolies (with the exception of Britain and Italy), and there was evidence at this time of an anti-commercialisation ethos (McQuail 1998). However, McQuail contends that in European broadcasting over the last decade business principles and commercial logic have become the norm rather than the exception: "profit-seeking and consumerism have been widely and largely de-demonized in Europe and have acquired respectability" (p. 112).

A number of factors have encouraged this, not least the general embracing by society of ideologies of consumption and materialism. The arrival of new technology has seen greater competition, much of it from new services such as cable, satellite and now digital channels which are set up as commercial operations rather than non-commercial public service providers. As audiences continue to fragment, the pressures mount for

[2]Other sources currently gaining in prominence include the sale and distribution of news stories to other media organisations at home or abroad, merchandising, and cross-promotional sponsorship deals

organisations to cultivate new sources of revenues, such as secondary markets. In some countries, liberalisation has contributed to an increasing scale of the media industry and this, coupled with exposure to the wider environment of global media, has resulted in a more business-like approach within the culture industries.

In the UK, exceptionally, the publicly funded BBC has existed alongside the commercial sector since the 1950s when the first independent broadcaster was launched. In the present competitive climate, the BBC is not immune from commercial pressures, despite its public service remit. Systems of internal marketing are now in place, and, externally, it has begun to compete successfully in global markets (Barrie 1999, Walker 1999). With regard to the UK's private broadcasting sector, this comprises Channel 4 (operating nationally since 1982), and the ITV (Independent Television) companies which since 1955 have broadcast regionally as well as provided programmes for their national network. During the 1970s and 1980s, the ITV companies made huge profits but these were achieved not so much as an outcome of sophisticated, profit-driven corporate strategies but as a consequence of the regulated and near-monopoly conditions in which they operated (Davidson 1992). Tight regulations enforcing public accountability prevented them from operating on truly market principles. Legislative changes through the 1990s, while still retaining some measures of public accountability, have encouraged competition for audiences and revenues both within the ITV system as well as from emergent cable, satellite and digital channels. Consequently the economic motives of the ITV companies are now more explicit, evidenced in the restructuring of organisations, outsourcing of work, and in the consolidation of ownership, including cross-media ownerships. Furthermore, the UK broadcasting sector is now characterised by complex relationships between the commercial sector, the public service broadcaster - the BBC, independent producers, distributors, newspapers and other forms of new media.

Countrywide Television (CTV, a pseudonym) is one of the regional television companies which make up the national ITV network It was launched in 1993 as a 'publisher-broadcaster', outsourcing much of its programme production (although news and local factual programmes were produced in-house). With around 400 permanent staff (56% of whom were directly involved in activities concerning transmission and programme making), it began life as a fairly flat organisation without the expensive overheads carried by traditional, vertically-integrated structures. Unions were not recognised, and traditional levels of staffing, fixed grades of pay, and many occupational working practices were dispensed with.

The Dutch newspaper sector: the case of de Volkskrant

In the Western European newspaper sector, although private ownership is not uncommon, and despite distinct differences between countries, there are indications of a concentration of ownership and "a down-market tabloid trend" (De Bens and Ostbye 1998, 7), both indicating a concern with economic priorities. However, in The Netherlands, while its newspapers' have always relied heavily on advertising for their revenues[3], non-commercial, professional concerns are still significant in terms of newspaper strategies. Compared with German, French or UK standards, Dutch `tabloids' are serious newspapers, characterised by content that is relatively sober and intellectual. Newspapers appear to take their public service role seriously, which is

[3]In the Netherlands, in 1980, 62.8% of the media advertising budget was spent on newspapers; in 1995, it was 47.9% (De Bens and Ostbye 1998).

evidenced by an anti-sensationalist journalistic ethic. This is helped by stable market positions because readership consists predominantly of long-term subscriptions. Important as well, and typical of the Dutch situation, is the editorial independence laid down by statute. There is set of rules and regulations defining the formal obligations and responsibilities of the parties involved (publishers, the editor-in-chief, the editorial staff, etc.) binding all Dutch newspapers, be it in different ways.

For journalists this "Chinese wall between journalism and commercial exploitation" (van Bemmel 1999) is one of the principle achievements of the 1970s. Moreover, the succession of economically-driven mergers and take-overs in the Dutch publishing industry has created a concern with diversity in news coverage by the Dutch press. As a result, the largest publishing group, PCM Publishers, has as a formal objective "to contribute to Dutch press diversity" which is safeguarded by allowing editorial staff the right to decide on the political, social and cultural course of the newspaper, relatively free of commercial pressure. Emphasis is placed on its national and regional newspapers continuing to be editorially-led, rather than commercially-driven. The in-company relations are further complicated by the fact that some newspapers within PCM Publishers (de Volkskrant, Trouw and Het Parool) are partly owned by foundations. Because their formal objective is to promote and protect the newspapers' identities, they function as a non-commercial counterbalance within this publishing firm. Yet, both the right to exist and the status of the newspaper, as well as its power base within its parent organisation, are at least partly derived from its commercial success. Moreover, the advancing commercialisation and growing acceptance of business-based arguments in the media arena do increase the pressure on editorial independence. Various publishing companies now consider the possibility of an editorial management team with journalists and non-journalists as executives (van Bemmel 1999). And only recently the CEO of PCM Publishers considered applying for a stock market quotation. Hence, the tension between profit-based and professional discourses seems to be built into the organisation as a continuing and inevitable dilemma in strategic decision making.

One of the four national newspapers of PCM Publishers is de Volkskrant. This morning paper is considered to be a serious and rather critical newspaper. De Volkskrant, the newspaper (krant) of the people (volk), started off as a catholic unions newspaper in 1919 and grew to become one of the major national newspapers in the Netherlands with a wide circulation (358,750 in 1995). The catholic bias was abandoned in the 1960s when the newspaper embarked on a left-wing course (Hemels 1981, van Vree 1996). Today the newspaper does not show its social engagement too obviously, if at all. It has a staff of around 250 editors[4]. Distribution, production, market research, merchandising and marketing are the responsibility of different divisions within the company.

Obviously, a variety of differences exists between our two focal organisations. Not only do they operate in different national contexts and in different media sectors, they also represent different ends of a continuum: one organisation is well established, operating in a relatively stable market and the other is new, operating in a dynamic

[4]There is no strict distinction between reporters and (sub) editors in the Dutch situation. Almost all of them do both news gathering and editing work. They all consider themselves to be journalists and editors.

market. Yet, as mass communicators they both share the same purpose - to produce a successful cultural product - and also undertake similar roles and responsibilities. In fulfilling their remit, both have explicit public service obligations which are achieved inter alia through a reliance on professional standards of production. Both are privately funded enterprises offering a cultural product that is increasingly confronted with commercial pressures. In this paper we prioritise the common ground that exists between the two cases and primarily focus on similarities rather than differences in order to illuminate the commercial-professional dilemma in the culture industries and the media sector in particular. In this way we are able to unfold some of the cultural complexities of the media production process. At the same time, we offer a contribution that goes beyond the usual research focus of "stick[ing] to one media sector in one corner of one nation". (Tunstall 1991)

METHODOLOGY

We researched our focal organisations as two separate studies although our attention was engaged in both studies in uncovering organisation members' cultural experiences. In both cases, data was derived from interviews, field observations, informal conversations and document analysis. The research process was characterised by an interchange between findings stemming from different sources and methods, with theoretical understanding and analysis occuring at the same time. In CTV, data collection occurred between 1993 and 1995; in de Volkskrant, it took place in 1997 and 1998. That investigations occurred at different times reflects the periods of change relevant to each industry.

Whereas participants in the CTV study included members from all organisational departments and levels of the hierarchy, the de Volkskrant study focused primarily on members involved in news production and its management. Therefore, to ensure comparability, this paper only focuses on the issues concerning those members employed in news, features and management in TV and de Volkskrant. This results in the CTV analysis being based on 39 interviews with 22 people (representing 45% of the total number of interviews), most of whom were interviewed twice over the course of years one to three[5].

Informal (spontaneous) conversations in both organisations contributed to a broader understanding of the issues and also often provided more personal insights and backgrounds. In both cases, documents provided factual details and background information; these included minutes of meetings, internal reports, internal newsletters, marketing research reports, audience viewing figures, annual reports and accounts, budgets, publicity brochures, press releases, personal correspondence, and relevant industry documents. At de Volkskrant, 14 formal interviews were conducted; participant observation occurred during four group meetings in which five to ten members of the editorial staff discussed the results of a survey about the newspapers' characteristics. In both CTV and de Volkskrant, observations of daily routines and formal meetings gave an impression of work life including everyday and strategic decision making.

Our accounts of CTV and de Volkskrant focus on the aspects which we consider most clearly exemplify commercial-professional tensions in our two organisations. We illustrate de Volkskrant through an example of editorial decision making and

[5]A more extensive discussion of the methodology and analysis are contained in Daymon (1998)

discussions of the newspaper's identity. In CTV, illustrations are provided which relate to the introduction of commercially-related procedures such as multiskilling, a working practice which allows for greater managerial control but which also undermines professional identities.

IDENTITY FORMATION IN A DUTCH NEWSPAPER

For a moment the editor-in-chief looked a little taken aback, crestfallen. He sat at the head of the table with a market research report on his lap. The profile of the newspaper was under discussion and he had just made the suggestion to focus more on `young women', because they constituted a market segment with growth potential. Two editors with central positions on the editorial staff (news commentators) objected to the suggestion on the grounds that "this was marketing". They argued for the primacy of internal over external considerations in determining the newspaper's editorial strategy, reasoning that the results of readership research should only be used to support, not to shape, management and editorial decisions: "We shouldn't allow a glance at the outside world to dictate how we make up our mind," one of them said. But, at the same time, a columnist who also held a position at a public television station disagreed, remonstrating that: "This is not a one-way traffic situation: you don't first go ahead and make a newspaper and only then see who reads it." In making decisions about direction and future news content, his concern was to take account of both external market and internal editorial sources.

This short excerpt from a discussion session within the editorial staff of de Volkskrant exemplifies the inherent tension between market forces and professional motives. The editor-in-chief, who cautiously tried to introduce a marketing approach into the discussion, had set out a more customer-oriented strategy for the newspaper three years before. Up till then, the stable readership base, commercial success and lack of direct competition in the 1980s, had encouraged amongst de Volkskrant editors an attitude of self-confidence, paternalism and indifference towards readers. In the 1990s, when growth is no longer self-evident in a saturated market, the new staff of chief editors started to place stronger emphasis on popular culture to lighten the paper's intellectual, left-wing image and to serve the increasing number and variety of readers. Although the editorial staff agreed that the paper used to be too critical and even a little "acidic", some amongst them were opposed to a practice of putting popular news (such as Spice Girls-mania) on the front page. This was considered trivial, cheap and banal entertainment, meant just to serve a broad reading public. This strategy particularly annoyed an old guard of editors who were dedicated to writing a 'quality' newspaper with high intellectual standards. "Aren't we rather jumping on the commercial bandwagon?" one of them wondered in the same discussion session. "Why do we absolutely need to have more than 300,000 subscriptions? We're not just a product in the market", another exclaimed. But, a more commercial discourse was also evident in the Volkskrant newsroom, as indicated by the cynical response of a columnist: "Perhaps you should also make the Daily Invisible. By definition, the mass media seek a broad audience! If you're not [aiming for lots of readers], perhaps you ought to think about doing something else." And another added: "What's wrong with serving the reader as well as trying to work out what they really want to read?"

Previously, newspaper content at de Volkskrant was produced on the editors' terms, rather than the readers'. Schlesinger's (1978) study of newspaper journalism noted this also, that journalists are "presenting the news, not trying to satisfy an audience, and the

less they know of the audience, the more attention they can pay to the news" (p.115). It is the professional's occupational knowledge and competence that enables her/him to evaluate and to provide what the audience needs. This does not necessarily mean a direct interaction with or focus on the audience (Schlesinger 1978, Gallagher 1982). To some extent editorial decision making in the 1990s, however, once considered the sole preserve of journalistic concerns, increasingly becomes infused with a more market-oriented approach.

De Volkskrant is no exception. When the dominant party in the Volkskrant newsroom, the new group of chief editors, decided to change the newspaper's strategy, here also a commercial discourse gained authority and influence. Those editors who held to a more traditional, journalistic perspective, however, were quick to interpret any business argument as undesirable commercial contamination of the newspaper's editorial process. They contested the authority of a market-driven discourse and questioned the extent to which commercial arguments deserved attention in decision making. Yet, despite their traditional stance, their orientation did not exclude the reader because, as one editor explained: "It is the journalist's duty to think about the reader. But that's not the same thing as letting the reader decide on the contents of our paper." In answer to the question "what's wrong with serving the reader", editors in the discussion session typically said, "We should be one step ahead of the reader." According to these traditionalists, it was the professional's competence and concern that led to an interesting, accurate and informing newspaper - rather than the preferences of the market.

However, the younger generation within the staff considered this to be a rather patronizing point of view. If the traditional journalist prioritises his or her own professional knowledge of the reader over the readers' own wishes and demands, then an assumption is made that s/he knows what is best for readers without really listening to them. In contrast, a commercial discourse which takes the reader more seriously, legitimises the new journalistic stance (held by younger members) which values the opinions of readers. Yet, despite the espoused stance of young journalists and the new editorial group, in four two-hour sessions with small groups of around ten editors (both older and younger) who discussed the newspaper's profile, the reading market was not once systematically considered or analyzed. In one discussion session the reader was not mentioned at all. Only the editor-in-chief dared to draw attention to research conducted by the marketing department.

Apparently, commercial procedures and profit-related strategies still met a silent aversion and lack of acceptance among Volkskrant journalists. When asked about the increasing importance of readership research, even those editors who were reader-oriented were quick to explain away the notion of de Volkskrant as a commercial newspaper. As one of them put it: "Look, we don't occupy ourselves with selling Volkskrant-pens or things like that. Journalists are not commercial thinkers. We keep far away from money-making." They objected to a strictly commercial exploitation of their ideological product and intellectual potential, considering that any promotional spinoffs had to contain a content-related aspect, such as when journalists provided news on the Internet or organised conferences. When their boss, the CEO of PCM Publishers, considered applying for a stock market quotation, the chief editors and editorial staff representatives jointly resisted the plan. So, although an increasing number of journalists were sympathetic to marketing principles, and commercial

arguments slowly seeped into everyday editorial decision making, all editors were still keen to protect their autonomy and identity as professional newspaper journalists. Any commercial interference from outside the newspaper's editorial staff was considered to be an attempt to capitalize on their intellectual property.

The cultural context of de Volkskrant can thus be characterized by a complex mix of traditional journalism and new commercialism. Different discourses mingled in the minds of individuals, in their arguments and conversations. In reality, marketing and journalistic principles were deployed situationally and strategically. All editors, supporters and opponents of commercialisation alike, used the reader to defend their position. An image of the reader was constructed and staged as an argument in favour of professional standards and private interests. After all, commercial imperatives (and market research based on questionnaire data) are ambiguous enough to leave room for divergent interpretations. And what the professional considers to be important for the reader, simultaneously reflects what s/he thinks and believes is good journalism.

The circumstantial and political nature of culture was evident, as an example, in the conduct of the editor-in-chief. He often found himself adopting a discourse in which the newspaper appeared as a product that needed to be merchandised in a competitive market. Yet, as a journalist he also advocated occupational principles at other occasions and even argued against economic imperatives whenever he was defending editorial independence or journalistic standards against commercializing pressures within the firm. This cultural complexity was not only embodied in chief-editors. A blurring of subcultural boundaries was indicated in a variety of personal stances and responses to situations, as illustrated in the following remark by a well-respected, older editor who had a particular perception and presentation of the newspaper's past:

> "De Volkskrant never gave a damn for the reader. That strategy appeared to be successful. We never wanted to sell as many papers as possible. We always reproached television for that, like 'they only look at viewing figures'. Forget the viewing figures and circulation numbers. Superficial things should not always rule the roost."

His remark was an attempt to legitimise an approach that disregarded readers' concerns (traditional professionalism) as a marketing strategy that suited de Volkskrant (new commercialism). It shows how members of the old guard tried to reinstate a traditional approach by incorporating commercial thinking into their own occupational ideology. Of course, this viewpoint was not only a concession to the new commercialism; it also contained the seeds of discord that were manifest in criticism. The editor-in-chief replied that this was a nostalgic, overly romantic picture of the past: "Despite our emancipation during the 1980s we did strengthen our anchors in the financial world. We do look at the reader market. We always did." A commentator on foreign affairs agreed: `De Volkskrant has always been opportunistic and chameleon-like: catholic in the 1960s, left-wing in the 1970s and 1980s, and now we're more popular. We've always been good in sensing the spirit of the times."

The common element in these reconstructions is that they all interpret and evaluate the newspaper's past according to present day commercial standards and principles in an attempt to justify their own journalistic approach. In this way, cultural commonality

and differences between traditional- and commercially-oriented journalists often go hand in hand.

IDENTITY FORMATION IN A BRITISH TELEVISION STATION

The current affairs editor glanced across the office to researchers preparing the week's programming:

> "Programmes are important," he stated, "but they are not the primary objectives of the company. Television sells advertising space and programmes are the bits in the middle ... It's the nature of the business - and it's silly and naive to believe that it isn't. I also believe that if we can make nice programmes that's an added bonus. "

The statement would have shocked the production teams had they overheard it. Such a blatant commercial stance was rare in journalistic realms. More usually, the making of 'quality' programmes, the accomplishment of professional standards and the achievement of public accolade were considered the raison d'etre of television. Yet, despite holding such views, the journalists were working for a company that was explicit about its fiscal ambitions. In 1993, CTV had launched with the stated intention of becoming a "successful long-term broadcasting business ... by providing a service of exceptional quality ... [and] exceptional value for money". [6] Profits and quality were signalled as intrinsic to business success, and quality was defined in market (rather than journalistic) terms, that is, "quite simply the best of its kind..... 'quality' to the viewer is no more and no less than the feeling that an expectation has been satisfied, that a programme has done what a programme ought to do". Unlike de Volkskrant, this positioned the company as one motivated by consumer demands and expectations. Indeed a key input into organisational decisionmaking was the support offered from market research data, such as BARB statistics, appreciation indices, focus groups, and other audience and market surveys including daily "overnight" figures. Business procedures such as strict budgets, performance measures, systems of accountability and appraisal, and formal reporting mechanisms symbolised management's business orientation and profit motives. In illustrating the evolution of television from the 1980s into the 1990s, a CTV producer highlighted the way she, herself, had learnt to deal with new commercial imperatives.

> "[Before I came to CTV] I never did departmental budgets, I never thought about the overheads, I never thought about salaries, I never thought about whether or not I was making a contribution. We just made programmes. We never cared about whether or not they made a profit or a loss. We just made them for the audience and now we make them for the audience but you have a different perspective. ... I now think through to the point of the deal; so when I'm dealing with a supplier [a programme producer], for instance, I have to evaluate whether the programme is a good idea, whether or not I think I can sell it, whether the price is right, whether the deal that we have with that independent producer is going to be worth our while investing the money in it, and then I have to manage the project."

[6] As outlined in CTV's franchise application document.

Previously this producer's own decisionmaking was creatively-led, resting on intrinsic professional understandings about the interests of the audience, with little concern for revenue generation. In the more competitive arena of the 1990s, she learnt, like other programme makers, to weigh professional judgements against commercial logic. Yet this was not always a rational process and sometimes market research was used merely to justify professional judgements, as one producer demonstrated when discussing how initial ideas were turned into productions:

> "It's a question of gut - and some research. The Americans research the hell out of everything. We tend not to over here [in the UK] although on occasions I will do so for specific needs. But I tend to do research more as a sales tool [to ensure the programme is picked up by the network or other distributors] rather than finding out what the audience wants."

Another was more emphatic: "There's a point when you have to ignore research ... [and just] say 'well that's very good but we don't want to do it that way' ". On occasion, a business rationale was discarded in favour of personal judgements and intrinsic professional criteria. Commercial logic, therefore, was overlaid with subjective reasoning, a residue of inherited understandings supported by ongoing professional attachments.

The company espoused efficiency, effectiveness and 'quality', and emphasised this stance by introducing strict budgetary frameworks. However, the issue of "quality against efficiency" (that is, professional versus commercial values) was often "a bit of a juggling act". A technician who was resigned to what he considered was a drop in the quality of output said that:

> " [The company] will tell you, "Of course, we want to maintain standards'. They're not exactly lying but we will maintain the standards to the value of money that they have at the time - and standards cost money."

His concerns were echoed at a senior level when a board-level director stated that: "Where the tension comes is in cost control these days really and there's a tension obviously where your editorial ambitions have to be kind of reigned back because of your concern about cost." His observations point to the difficulties for programme makers in facilitating journalistic aspirations within the constraints imposed by budgetary systems. It is notable that, in order to achieve 'quality' in their work, journalists rely for their benchmark on what is known to be acceptable to professional reference groups, and also on standards achieved previously. Thus current activities are evaluated according to the past. However, with the introduction of commercial constraints and business procedures, such as objective performance measures, definitions of quality can be compromised. Yet, criteria such as newsworthiness, balance and accuracy cannot, by definition, be driven by financial imperatives nor appraised by measures derived from business principles. Through a process of negotiation between commercial and professional discourses, a form of agreement is reached that is acceptable for each situation: "There's a conflict of targets, somebody wanting to get something on air with the very best quality and somebody just wanting

to get it on air, and [saying], 'Yes, that'll do, we're going to put it out', and the other person saying, 'No, it won't do'." This problem exists in all television organisations, including the BBC, but was more pronounced in CTV where profit objectives were explicit from its earliest days, thus influencing strategic and journalistic decisions.

It was at the level of middle management in CTV that the circumstantial and political nature of culture was most evident. Because managerial responsibilities and expert functions existed within the same job, this routinised the commercial-professional dilemma. For example, regional editors considered themselves to be "straddling some sort of no man's land in the middle" because as journalists their attachment was to professional values (collegiality, quality, intrinsic controls). Simultaneously, however, they were aligned as managers with a business frame of reference concerning coordination, profit goals and extrinsic controls. "[Allocating individual bonuses] was the first time I felt a real sense of conflicting loyalties... it was the first time I thought 'This has put me in direct conflict with my feelings as somebody who heads up this team that I have a loyalty to.' " The choice of one stance signalled submission to commercial values and beliefs, a denial of professional understandings and journalistic approval. The other route indicated allegiance to journalist colleagues but rejection of the managerial role. Editors therefore oscillated between competing values, depending on the situation, the degree of involvement with professional peers and the task at hand, as well as affinity to the issue at stake. Self-interest permeated the above stances; when managerial bonuses were linked to individuals' ability to manipulate budgets, inexperienced managers ended the financial year deliberately under-budget on the mistaken premise that this would demonstrate their own financial astuteness. Their enthusiastic internalisation of commercial values and the individual ambition of some managers, indicated a suppression at this time of professional values concerning collegiality and quality criteria.

In the company's desire to achieve "efficiency and flexibility", multiskilling was introduced to news and technical roles. Not only did multiskilling provide an in-house resource that could more effectively match fluctuating workloads, but it also provided greater scope for managerial control. [7] Roles once granted elite status because of the extent of their specialised training (such as post-production editors) no longer existed or were incorporated into wider job specifications thus breaking down professional identities, pride and values[8]. Notions of professional autonomy and peer group control were diminished when specialists became, as they termed themselves, mere "jacks of all trades" - the term "trade" in itself suggesting a market-driven approach. This erosion of boundaries occurred not only in CTV, but increasingly across the industry, signalling to those once considered 'experts' the transition of television from "an art form" into a commercial business. Complaints amongst the older, more experienced members of CTV about the difficulty of achieving 'quality' standards suggest that quality was interpreted not in market terms, as per management's understanding, but according to the preservation of professionally recognised

[7]A disadvantage initially, however, was that because few television companies at this time were similarly geared to multiskilling operations, there were difficulties in locating freelancers with sufficient skills to "backfill" whenever a multi-skilled staff member was sick or involved in job rotation. Towards the middle of the 1990s, however, as new cable operators launched and other broadcasters transformed their working practices, CTV's multiskilled labour force became highly employable externally. The company subsequently experienced problems of retention in some areas.

[8]Some engineers could mix bulletins, edit, work in sound and with cameras; a number of journalists were able to do their own editing, some programme assistants could also vision mix and direct.

standards, in the scale and independence of news, or in 'craft' terms such as the creative use of technology (Corner et al 1994). In contrast, younger members held fewer assumptions about traditional notions of professionalism; the industry's failure during the 1990s to provide long term specialist training or apprenticeship schemes resulted in less assimilation by younger members into traditional professional cultures in the first place. Therefore, they interpreted multiskilling as an opportunity for diversity in work and enhanced personal 'employability'. Nevertheless, they continued to seek approval and recognition from professional reference groups.

With the exception of the example of young journalists in CTV, the common element in these illustrations is that they endeavoured to make sense of the present by drawing on norms and expectations from the past. However, at times this was problematic because CTV's business-based practices, together with a more commercialised industry, contributed to an undermining of traditional professional identities. Thus the applicability of past understandings and expectations was threatened. To some extent, this explains why organisation members utilised different discourses instrumentally, despite their individual favouring of one set of values over another, although this is also indicative of processes through which members attempted to re-secure or reshape professional identities. In any case, the opportunistic deployment of commercial and professional discourses characterises the negotiations through which complex cultural contexts are continuously formed.

CULTURAL IDENTITIES: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

This paper reveals commercial and professional values and norms as the core elements of the culture of our focal organisations. In both case studies, we found increasing pressures towards commercialisation alongside (and sometimes challenging) traditional notions of professionalism. It is obvious from our two case descriptions that a commercial discourse is more explicit in the British television station where there is evidence of acceptance by some and compliance by others of business principles. CTV was still in its infancy, operating in a dynamic, highly competitive environment. Viewing figures, research ratings and recourse to business procedures (such as budgets, performance appraisals, etc) offered rational support to the achievement of profitability and therefore organisational survival. Yet, it is notable, that on occasions, individuals used these rational measures to justify subjectively-based judgements. However, at an organisational level, professional values and expectations were often suppressed despite muted individual protests. At the Dutch newspaper, in contrast, members held a more defensive attitude towards business arguments, suspecting that these compromised the intellectual property of their work and their newspaper. A traditional ethic which prioritised journalistic principles counteracted the new commercialism.

Despite a variety of differences (Dutch-English, newspaper-television, established-new, stable-dynamic context) between the two media organisations, the essence of the underlying cultural politics of everyday organisational life in these two media organisations was the competition between commercial-economic and professional-journalistic values. To some extent, commercial thinking is already embedded in media organisations because, as businesses, they recognise that in order to survive they need to maintain market-share and generate income. Therefore, business principles and notions of rationality, efficiency and effectiveness are already built into everyday organising processes. Economic, managerial and marketing ideas

have become part of daily decision making as valuable legitimations of opinions, policies, and practices. In a sense, the commercial discourse compromises notions of professionalism and undermines professional identities. Because the two discourses are based on divergent assumptions, norms and orientations, they constitute a dilemma for people working in media organisations. Indeed, material and symbolic struggles are regularly triggered in which the two discourses are diametrically opposed.

Yet, despite the fact that the (newer) commercial discourse and its accompanying business-related strategies are derived from wider managerial ideologies, they nevertheless are informed by the (familiar) value judgements and culturally specific beliefs of each organisation, industry and profession. Newness, therefore, rests alongside the familiar - or, as Negus (1988), in writing about the culture industry has suggested, culture is created through a fine balance of the known and the novel. This is exemplified in the way in which members of de Volkskrant interpreted the past according to the present - just as CTV members interpreted the present according to the past. By drawing on marketing principles, de Volkskrant members rationalised and reinterpreted historical professional practices. In turn, CTV members made sense of the more explicitly commercial present through the lens of inherited professional norms and expectations. This enabled some to accept and justify economic goals, others to accede to the dominant commercial discourse while continuing to cling to traditional, professional imperatives. In both companies, familiar beliefs, values and norms persisted as a residue of former experiences and cultural understandings which were reinforced through ongoing internal and external professional associations. Both emergent and residual elements (Williams 1977), therefore, contributed to the shaping of individual and organisational identities.

However, although members of media organisations tend to favour one discourse or the other, business and professional principles are situationally and strategically deployed. The interrelation between the two discourses does not necessarily have to be antagonistic - although very often it is - because commercial and professional standards are not always perceived or presented in terms of contradiction and competition. Most members of the focal organisations recognised the authority and validity of both commercial and professional norms in everyday decision making, even if some preferred one over another. For some, the symbolic divide between commercial and professional thinking was rather dubious. In relation to the choice between an external/marketing versus an intrinsic/professional orientation, one newspaper editor said: "It's impossible to draw a definite line: the outside world is sitting at this table...". Many considered both commercial and professional qualities as equally indispensable for the company's success, believing that in everyday decision making it paid to cover oneself from every angle. Therefore, they emphasized the importance of commercial values on one occasion and professional values on another, or both at the same time. Others, despite having a preference for either a professional or a commercial stance, were equally instrumental, their different ambitions and criteria of success, for example, motivating them to negotiate their contexts according to status needs or the potential for future employability. Therefore, according to the nature of the situation and its potential consequences, members selected the discourse that was most advantageous to their own or their group's interests.

These findings suggest that organisational culture is an ensemble of meanings, values and norms that mutually implicate, support, or contradict each other. Organisational

discourses and practices supply a variety of different ideas, values, symbols and norms that together do not constitute a coherent, stable, patterned whole, as is suggested by various authors (e.g. Schein 1992), nor is it a diffuse, inconsistent set of ideas and interpretations as is suggested by others (e.g. Meyerson 1990). We would like to suggest, it is both (Daymon 1998, forthcoming; Ybema 1997). Disparate cultural meanings may be consistent or inconsistent depending on the time, the issue or the interests that are at stake.

To an extent, these ideas reflect those of Strauss et al (1971) who argued that individuals and groups continually make adjustments to situations in which they find themselves. Although their theory of negotiated order is primarily concerned with structure and individual or group goal attainment (Fine 1984), its ideas support our findings that cultural identities are not fixed and stable but are continuously constructed. Through a process of negotiation, members' personal and collective interests interact and compete with organisational imperatives. Personal interests are prioritised according to historically-based expectations and what is most compelling at the time. Change (ongoing negotiations) and continuity (the negotiated order) are interrelated and interdependent realities.

That cultural identities might evolve through dynamic, interlacing processes, where dissonant interpretive systems and discourses compete and are renegotiated, echoes the sympathies of writers interested in political differences or the well-being of less-powerful groups. The process of cultural evolution whereby identities are renewed or reshaped is referred to in a number of empirical studies, including Knights and Willmott (1985, 1995) who have shown how cultures can be destabilised, or redefined and reconstituted. The assumption here, however, is that cultures will probably metamorphose into a different version of an already established pattern. We suggest that cultures do not change from one pattern to another but are in a constant state of flux, comprising shifting patterns of meanings (Bloor and Dawson 1994; Feldman 1991; Meyerson 1994). This is so because of the opportunistic nature of individuals who are not 'corporate clones' disciplined by the cultural discourses of elite groups, such as senior management, but, particularly in the culture industries, are instead fairly autonomous in shaping their cultural preferences.

Traditionally, organisational culture studies have focused on control, emphasising management attempts to promulgate consistent cultural identities because this is deemed to affect organisational performance. Different authors have pointed out that there are moral implications in this type of cultural manipulation (Filby and Willmott 1988; Stevenson and Bartunek 1996; Willmott 1993), such as the suppression or elimination of individual and group values in favour of managerially inspired values and discourses. Yet, our investigations of de Volkskrant and CTV suggest that control and cultural manipulation are not the sole prerogative of management. Indeed, by their recourse to inherited norms and their instrumental advocacy of both commercial and professional discourses, members of de Volkskrant and CTV sought to better secure their professional identities and status, and thus to wrest control over their work and safeguard their futures.

CONCLUSION

The impetus for our study has been to investigate how members of media organisations deal with their increasingly commercialised working environments. This

drew our attention to how cultural identities are formed because through this focus we have been able to note the interactions that take place between members' personal and collective interests and those of the organisation. We have found that media organisations are characterised by conflicting ideologies which are exposed in the tension between commercial values concerning profits, and professional values concerning quality. In endeavouring to shape their cultural context, members choose to refashion the past by drawing on understandings of the present, or interpret the present by drawing on the past. Yet increasing market pressures and managerially-inspired discourses threaten to dislodge and frustrate traditional, professional expectations, and therefore organisation members find it increasingly difficult to arrive at collective understandings by recourse to historical norms and values. Nevertheless, it seems to us that media professionals are still intrinsically involved and dedicated to producing quality television programmes and newspapers. They manage to fit commercial principles within professional interpretive frameworks by situationally and strategically deploying divergent cultural values, ideologies and discourses according to the interests, emotions and identifications of groups and individuals. In conceptualising the ongoing processes through which individuals and organisations interact to negotiate their contexts and identities, we note that change and continuity, harmony and conflict, exist simultaneously, and that cultural identities are continuously negotiated through interlacing processes of the known and the novel.

By offering an account that is sensitive to the ambivalence and precariousness of the stance that members of media organisations take towards the commercial-professional issue, our study acknowledges the often paradoxical nature of cultural reality. It also presents an 'extreme case' of the cultural politics of the profits versus quality debate that is ongoing within all organisations.

THE END

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